



**Shaun A. Suhoski**, *Town Manager*  
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### **MEMORANDUM**

TO: Athol Board of Selectmen  
FR: Shaun A. Suhoski, Town Manager  
RE: Town Manager's Report  
DT: May 19, 2020

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**COVID-19 Update / Preliminary Planning for Future Re-opening:** On Monday, Governor Baker's "Reopening Advisory Board" issued the first of a planned four phase reopening strategy for the Commonwealth. A series of documents and guidelines accompanied the initial report and have been downloaded and are under review by the Town Manager, Board of Health Agents and the local reopening advisory task force which has been expanded to include a representative from the Dept. of Public Works.

This group will ensure that our local protocols conform with the governance and health guidelines issued by the Commonwealth. The task force will initially focus upon Town Hall services and then expand to look at how the Library and Senior Center will safely deliver services in our changed environment. The advisory task force includes:

- Bridget Sullivan, BOS and TM Executive Assistant
- Joseph Guarnera, Fire Chief and Emergency Management Director
- Brian Brusco, Acting Facilities Manager
- Jane O'Brien, Assistant Health Agent (designee of Health Agent)
- Nancy Burnham, Town Clerk and President of SEIU collective bargaining unit
- Lee Chauvette, Board of Selectmen Liaison
- Richard Kilhart, Asst. DPW Superintendent

The team will expand to include the Library and Senior Center directors as their work continues over time. The police and fire departments will adhere to guidance and best practices promulgated by their peer organizations. For now and until we can implement the required protocols and self-certify compliance with the Governor's orders our municipal buildings will remain closed to the public.

I anticipate presenting a more detailed timeline – which may also include modifications due to budgetary concerns – at the June 2 Board meeting. During the interim, the Health Agent and I will continue to share information and keep the Town's Web site ([www.athol-ma.gov](http://www.athol-ma.gov)) and social media current with relevant information and updates.

**Budget Discussion Request:** Rather than re-hash the fact that the FY21 revenue projections appear dire absent federal and/or state guidance and assistance, I will advise that I have requested department managers to revise their FY21 requests to incorporate level-fund and five-percent reduction scenarios.

Obviously, this has been met with frustration as meeting those benchmarks will necessitate a reduction in payroll costs. While we will strive to avoid any cuts that compromise services, the Board will need to vote a 1/12<sup>th</sup> budget at the June 2 meeting to ensure continuity of operations after July 1.

Until the revenue picture clarifies the Town must start on lean footing in FY21. Because all collective bargaining agreements are settled through June 30, 2021, employees are entitled to receive all contracted compensation and benefits.

Thus, in addition to the requested departmental cuts, if the Town must dig deeper we will need to consider a mix of:

- Careful review and use of any eligible FEMA, CARES Act or other funding sources
- Temporary suspension or reduction of services (eg. beaches, summer recreation, library, etc.)
- Targeted or rolling furloughs
- Workshare program (reduction in hours supported unemployment benefits)
- Deferred implementation of contracted raises (subject to negotiation)
- Use of undesignated fund balance (free cash) to cover loss of revenues from pandemic

We truly are planning for the worst, while working towards the best outcome.

To help facilitate more discussion on budget before June 2, I am asking whether the BOS and Finance Committee would hold a joint virtual meeting on Wednesday or Thursday, May 27<sup>th</sup> or May 28<sup>th</sup>?